

IN THE CLAIMS:

1 - 36. (Cancelled)

37. (Currently Amended) The method of managing documents and messages associated with the financial transaction in the system of claim ~~35~~ 46, wherein the user may transfer the ~~bit-mapped~~ image in the first transaction folder into a second transaction folder.

38. (Currently Amended) The method of managing documents and messages associated with the financial transaction in the system of claim ~~35~~ 46, wherein the storing of the first transaction folder at the first regional processing center occurs at night and the storing of the first transaction folder at the local trade records information management system occurs during the day.

39. (Currently Amended) The method of managing documents and messages associated with the financial transaction in the system of claim ~~35~~ 46 comprising:

connecting the first regional ~~processor~~ processing center with a second regional ~~processor~~ processing center such that a second remote site can access the first transaction folder stored in the first regional ~~processor~~ processing center via the second regional ~~processor~~ processing center.

40. (Currently Amended) The method of managing documents and messages associated with the financial transaction in the system of claim ~~35~~ 46, wherein any data input

into the system by the first site must be routed to the local trade records information management system in order to be placed into the first transaction folder.

41. (Currently Amended) The method of managing documents and messages associated with the financial transaction in the system of claim ~~36~~ 46, wherein the first transaction folder is a new transaction folder created by the local trade records information management system.

42. (Currently Amended) The method of managing documents and messages associated with the financial transaction in the system of claim ~~36~~ 46, wherein the first transaction folder is a pre-existing transaction folder.

43. (Currently Amended) The method of managing documents and messages associated with the financial transaction in the system of claim ~~36~~ 46, wherein the information related to the financial transaction which is stored within the first transaction folder is further comprised of inbound fax messages.

44. (New) A trade records information management system for storing, searching, and retrieving data pertaining to financial transactions, comprising:

a plurality of central data storage means maintained at a plurality of regional processing centers, each central data storage means includes means for storing transaction data folders which contain images, information about the images, messages and completed inquiries;

a plurality of customer service units that are remote from each of the plurality of regional processing centers, each customer service unit having local data storage means of at least 500 megabytes of memory maintained at the customer service units, the local data storage means includes means for storing the transaction data folders which contain the images and messages and completed inquiries;

means for transmitting the images to the customer service units after determining that the images are not electronically stored at the customer service units;

a communications network connecting each regional processing center with at least one customer service unit in a set associated with each of the plurality of regional processing centers and connecting the plurality of regional processing centers together;

means for inputting data into each of the plurality of central data storage means from a plurality of sources, the means including means for creating and inputting images of hard copy documents;

means for indexing input data in the central data storage means and creating the transaction data folder related to the transaction, each of the transaction data folders containing a unique identifier and at least one image file of the at least one hard copy document wherein the image file of the hard copy document related to the transaction is stored in the transaction data folder;

means for searching the local data storage means in response to structured queries and identifying records that match the queries;

graphic user interface means for allowing users to build the structured queries;

means for displaying data in the local data storage means so as to enable the transaction data folder to be reviewed;

means for restricting users to only retrieve images from the local data storage means;

means for allowing a user to monitor another user's work-in-process at any time to monitor the backlog and assigned levels of work and means for assigning monitoring privileges to select users;

means for assigning the transaction data folder to the users based upon a predetermined routing procedure;

means for creating a work queue for the users;

means for allowing the users to exchange database data;

means for maintaining the internal unique identifier to identify the transaction data folder and document with an image transaction identification number;

means for retrieving identified data records from one of the plurality of central data storage means in response to the structured queries and replicating data records retrieved from the central data storage means in the local data storage means;

gateway means located at each of the plurality of regional processing centers, for linking the central data storage means with the local data storage means at each of the customer service units and linking the communication network to other networks; and

wherein the transaction data folders can be accessed by customer service representatives at any network location.

45. (New) A process of trade records information management for storing, searching, and retrieving data pertaining to financial transactions comprising the steps of:

preprocessing inbound paper-based documents including scanning the inbound paper-based documents;

indexing the inbound paper-based documents;

storing images;

storing information about the images;

storing messages and completed inquiries;

inputting data into a central data storage means from a plurality of sources;

indexing input data in the central data storage means and creating a transaction data folder, the transaction data folder containing a unique identifier and an image file containing an image of at least one paper-based document, information about the at least one paper-based document, messages and completed inquiries;

assigning the transaction data folder to a particular user based upon predetermined routing rules;

creating a queue for the particular user, the queue containing documents and inquiries for processing;

monitoring document work flow for backlog and assigned work levels;

connecting regional processing centers with a plurality of customer service units through a communications network linking the central data storage means with local data storage means at each of the customer service units and linking the communications network to other networks to allow data communication between the data storage means and the networks;

restricting user workstations to only retrieve images from local storage devices;

searching the data storage means in response to structured queries and identifying records that match the queries;

maintaining an internal unique key identifier to identify each of the transaction data folder and documents with an image transaction identification number; and

transmitting images to the customer service unit, the customer service unit having at least 500 megabytes of memory, wherein a determination is first made that the images are not locally stored at the customer service unit.

46. (New) A method of managing documents and messages associated with a financial transaction in a system comprising:

scanning at least one paper document associated with the financial transaction to generate at least one image of the at least one paper document at a first site;

transmitting the at least one bit mapped image to a first regional processing center;

retrieving the at least one image at a local trade records information management system from the first regional processing center after determining that the at least one image is not electronically stored at the local trade records information management system;

indexing the at least one image at the local trade records information management system;

creating a first transaction folder at the local trade records information management system wherein the first transaction folder contains information related to the financial transaction including the at least one image and messages;

storing the first transaction folder at both the local trade records information management system and the first regional processing center;

retrieving information within the first transaction folder from either the first regional processing center or the local trade records information management system;

wherein a user may access the first transaction folder at the local trade management information system when the regional processing center is off-line; and

wherein a system administrator may restrict the user to access only images from local storage devices.